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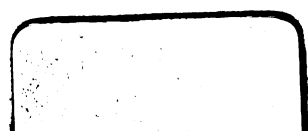
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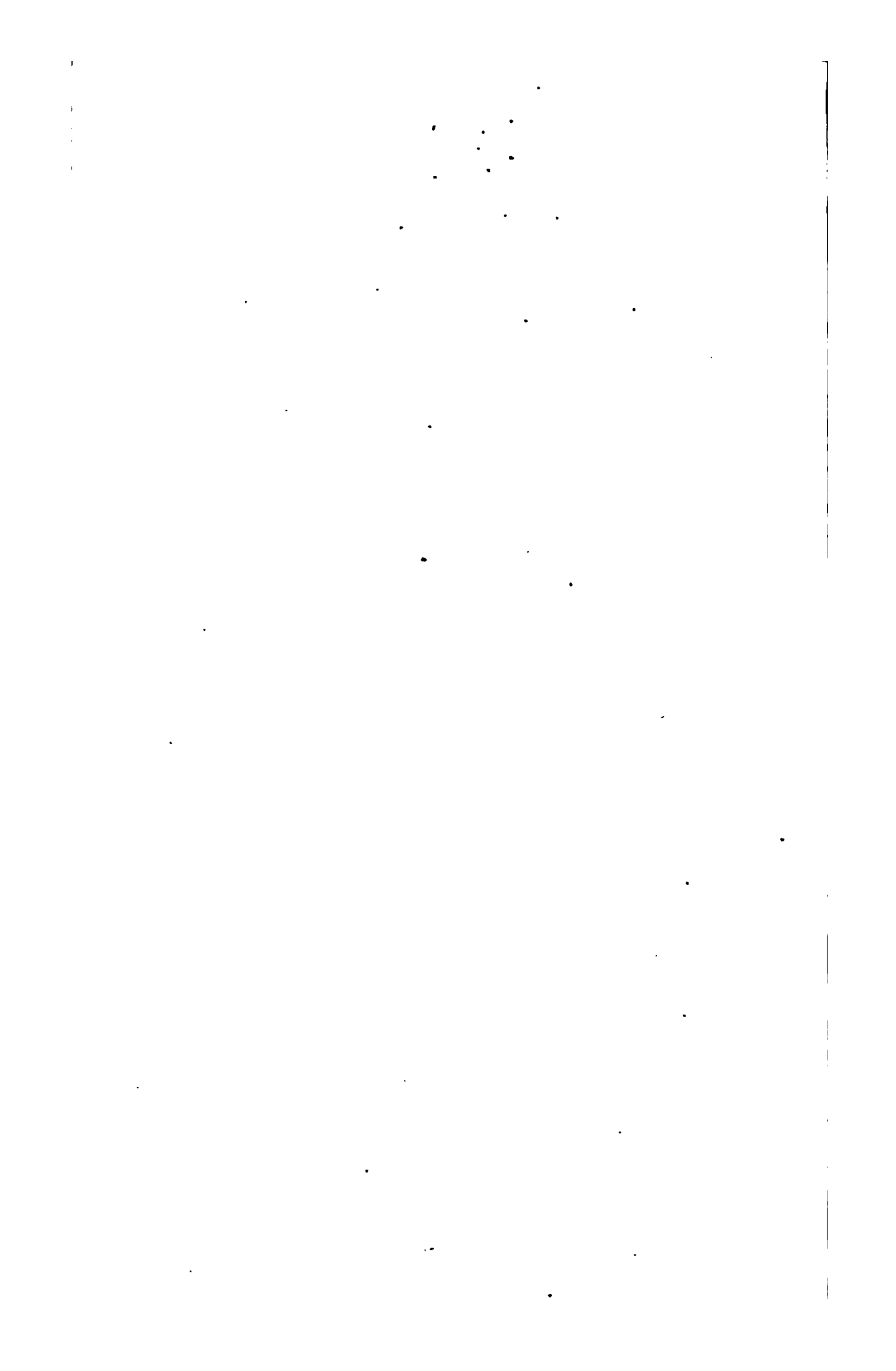
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FROM
BRITISH HISTORY

BY

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'Remember the days of old'

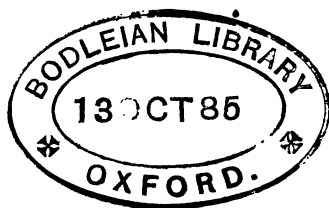
'Not to know what has happened before one's own
days is to remain a child for ever'

LONDON
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1882

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P R E F A C E.

THESE TALES, several of which have not been Englished before, are drawn from original sources. The writer has chosen such stories as he thought would amuse and please his readers, and give them at the same time some knowledge of the lives and thoughts of their forefathers. To this end he has not written solely of great folk—kings and queens and generals—but also of plain people and children, aye, and birds and beasts too. Moreover, this wider range of subject best befits a reader, from the greater store of simple terms which must needs be used. Long phrases and out-of-the-way words have been carefully eschewed ; and such plain, homely English as has been

kept to throughout will not be beyond the reach of those whom the writer hopes will be his most numerous, though not his only, readers—the children of this country and the Greater Britain over seas.

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OLD STORIES

FROM

BRITISH HISTORY.

1. **The English People in Old Times.**— Nearly fifteen hundred years ago the English people first came to Britain, and took part of it from the Welsh, and lived in it, and called it England after their own name. For some time after they came here they were heathens, like some of the black people you read about, who live in foreign lands beyond the sea, and, like them, they worshipped many gods, and believed many strange stories about them. These stories are such as we should now call fairy tales, and tell to children to amuse them ; but in those days even wise, grown-up people thought they were true. For you must not think that the English, at the time we are talking of, were foolish in other ways because of

10 OLD STORIES FROM BRITISH HISTORY.

their strange beliefs. There were good sailors and brave soldiers, hard-working farmers and skilful smiths and carpenters, among them ; and they could take care of themselves, and hold their own whether at work or play. But they had no books, so they did not know much that wise men in other lands had already found out ; and they had never set their own minds to work to find out the truth about many of the wonderful things that go on in the world. So they were content when they did not understand a thing to guess at a reason for it, and they never took much care to see whether their guess was right or wrong. And so they went on doing their daily work and earning their daily bread for many a long year, without knowing much that in our time nearly every little child learns at school. There is only room here to tell you a few of the beliefs that our forefathers held before they became Christians, and before they learnt what was written in the wise books of learned men.

2. The Sun.—They thought the sun was a fair goddess, who was drawn across the sky every day in a chariot by two horses called Early and Swift. So bright and glowing was she that the gods had to put a large round

shield in front of her for fear her burning rays should make the seas boil and the rocks melt. And that, they said, is why the sun looks round and bright like a polished shield; for you cannot see the face of the goddess herself. You have heard of an *eclipse of the sun*. It is an astonishing thing to see, and likely to



ECLIPSE OF THE SUN.

frighten anyone who does not know the real cause of it. In the middle of the day the clear face of the sun is blackened bit by bit. Sometimes for a moment or two it is quite dark like night, and the fowls and singing-birds go to roost, and the owls, and bats, and beasts of the night come out, thinking that

the day is over. We know that this is caused by the moon passing in front of the sun and hiding it from us. But Englishmen in those old days did not know the reason of this sudden darkness, and they made an odd guess at it. They said that there was a huge beast like a wolf always rushing through the sky after the sun to try and swallow it; and that sometimes this wolf would catch the sun in his great black jaws, so that it was lost to sight for a while. And so, when an eclipse happened, they were dreadfully afraid that the beast would swallow the sun altogether, and that the world would be left in darkness. Then everybody would rush out into the air, and shout and whoop. The good wives beat their brass pans with the wooden spoons; the men clashed their spears and shields together, or hammered away on the smith's anvil; the very children kept up a rattle with sticks and stones—all to try and frighten the beast, and make him open his mouth and let the sun go. This seems funny enough; but there are millions of people alive in China who, whenever an eclipse happens, still do as our forefathers did to save the sun from being swallowed.

3. The Moon and Stars.—If the old English

had such fancies about the sun, you may be sure that they had plenty of odd tales to tell about the moon. They said the full moon was the sun's brother, that drove through the sky of nights as the sun did by day. The sickle-shaped moon, when it is 'lying on its back,' as we say, they believed to be a great silver pail, borne on a pole by a giant and giantess.



MOON ON ITS BACK.

For they used buckets of that shape in those days—shallower and more rounded at the bottom than our buckets are now.

As for the stars, they had much to say about them. They had given names to all the brightest ones, and there was a story to every name. We know only a few of those

tales, for most of them have been lost. You shall hear some of them, however, that were written down a long time ago by a clever man, who thought it a pity that these strange old stories should be clean forgotten. For when people became Christians they did not believe such tales any more, and so they took no care to keep them in their minds, and only told them round the fire for pastime at Christmastide. So that at last there were only a few old folk left who knew them, and, when they died, those tales that had not been written down were lost altogether.

4. What the old English thought of the Earth.—To understand the stories you must bear in mind that the heathen English did not know that this earth we live on is a huge round ball spinning round the sun. They thought it was a broad flat plain, ringed about by the ocean. Beyond the ocean, to the north, in the dark, cold lands, where there are snow-clad mountains, and frozen rivers, and lofty cliffs of ice, they thought the *giants* lived, big, cruel, stupid beings, who were the foes of gods and men. While in the warm south, above the hills, in a fair, bright land, walled round to keep the giants out, they said the gods dwelt. In the dark, sunless valleys of the hills and

under the earth, in the caves of the rocks, and deep in mines under ground lurked the dwarves. These were strange, artful, cunning little



THE DWARVES.

beings, who worked in gold, and silver, and copper, and iron, and made fine, sharp sword-blades, and wonderful necklaces, and rings,

and bracelets, which men and women were sometimes lucky enough to get from them. A dwarf was seldom seen above ground save after sunset, for if one ray of the sun's light fell upon him he would be turned into stone on the spot. In many places there are strangely-shaped rocks and stones, and these were believed to be dwarves that had been touched by a sunbeam.

5. The God Thunder.—The gods and giants were always at war with each other. The god Thunder was the champion of the gods, and killed many of the giants with his hammer, the thunderbolt. After him is named the fourth day of the week, Thunder's Day, which we now call Thursday. When a storm came on, people thought that the long rolling peal of distant thunder was the rumbling of his car as he drove through the sky. And when the dazzling lightning flashed across the dark clouds, they said that the god was hurling his mighty hammer at some evil monster. They thought of Thunder as a big, burly, good-natured man, with a long, red beard. It is of him that one of the stories will tell.

6. The Bold Giant.—One day, when Thunder came home to supper in the great hall of the gods, he found a huge giant sitting

at the table there, eating and drinking and boasting loudly of what he could do, and threatening the gods and goddesses. They did not quite know what to do, for he was a very big giant and ill to deal with, as he had a head of stone; besides, they did not like to show a guest to the door. But Thunder bade him begone at once, and off he went grumbling. However, before he turned away he told Thunder that he could not fight him then because he had left his great stone club and thick shield at home, but, said he, 'if you will meet me on the borders of Giantland in a month's time, I will punish you for turning me away from the gods' table.' Thunder said that he and his servant Delve would be there at the day set. When the giant, whose name was Rungner, got home and told his fellow-giants that he had offered to fight Thunder, they thought he had been very rash, but they wished to do their best to help him. So as none of them had courage enough to stand by him in the fight, they made a great giant-like figure of clay, which they called 'Muck-calf,' and set it up with shield and club on the battle field, and put a mare's heart in its breast to make it brave.

7. The Giant is Slain.—When the day

18 OLD STORIES FROM BRITISH HISTORY.

came, Rungner and Muck-calf, looking very fierce and bold, stood waiting for Thunder. By and by up comes Delve, Thunder's little



THE GIANTS SLAIN BY THUNDER.

servant, a cunning fellow, and calls out to the giant, 'If you hold your shield so high you will soon be killed, for my master's hammer-

strokes often come from below.' Rungner thought he would make himself safe beforehand, so he made haste to put his large thick shield on the ground and stood upon it, feeling sure that no thunderbolt could pierce through it. But at that very minute Thunder appeared in the air, and hurled his lightning hammer full at the giant's bare head. Rungner swung up his thick stone club to meet the stroke, but it was of little use. The god's hammer flew with such force that it broke the giant's club in two, and struck Rungner dead to the earth. As for poor Muck-calf, his heart was not a very brave one after all, and he stood shivering and shaking like a frightened horse, till Delve ran up and killed him.

8. Thunder's Wound.—Yet Thunder did not get off scot-free. One half of the giant's broken club flew over the ocean-stream and fell on the earth, and out of it all the bones in the world have been made. But the other piece flew into Thunder's skull, and there it stayed and could not be got out. So Thunder went off to a certain wise woman called *Grow*, and begged her to help him. And she fell to singing over his wounded head some magical charm-songs which she alone knew. When

she had sung two or three verses, Thunder felt that the bit of hone-stone was loosening, and he thought he would repay her for her kindness. So he told her how he had saved her husband *Orwandle*, the hunter, from the giants, and carried him in a basket from Giantland to earth. 'But,' said he, 'it was so cold that one of his toes which stuck out of the basket was frozen and fell off! However, I have taken care of it, and put it safely in the sky, and your husband will be home again with you in a few hours.' Grow was so delighted to hear of her husband's safety, and so pleased to know that she should soon see him again, that she clean forgot the words of the song she was singing, and was forced to stop before the end. So the bit of hone-stone still remains in Thunder's skull, and it can never be got out. And everyone that has a hone must take care to handle it gently, for if it is thrown about, or carelessly let fall, the other piece that is in Thunder's head gives a sharp wrench which hurts him very much.

9. *The Star-Cluster Orion*.—On a clear night in winter, if you go out of doors and look up at the sky, you will see a group of stars set like the cut. This cluster, which we now call by its Greek name *Orion*, the old

English called Orwandle, Grow's husband, and the brightest star of all those that are in it they called Orwandle's Toe. And if you look carefully at the cluster you can make out, as it were, the shape of a huge



ORION.

man marked out with stars. The two bright stars at the top are his hands, the two bright stars below are his feet, the three fine stars in a line are the clasps on his belt, and below them are some smaller stars

which mark the hilt of his knife and the shape of its sheath. Other small stars mark his club and shield. There are no stars to mark his eyes, for the story goes that he was blind. Near this wonderful star-cluster you will find two other groups with a bright star in each. These are called the *Big Dog* and the *Little Dog*. For a hunter, like Orwandle, must of course have his Hounds with him. Above Orwandle is a star-cluster called the Bull, with a very bright star in it called the *Bull's Eye*. And it is this Bull that the great Hunter is chasing through the sky.

10. *The Giant Eagle*.—There are two bright stars lying close together in the sky which are now called the *Twins*. You may see them not very far from the star-clusters, which you have just read about. In old days the English called these two stars the *Giant's Eyes*, and told the following tale of how they came to be in the heavens:—There was once upon a time a giant named *Daze*, who took the shape of a great eagle, and flew into the land of men to see what he could pick up. He found three of the gods sitting under a big tree, lighting a fire of dry wood under a huge kettle. They wanted to cook an ox which they had just killed and flayed, for

they had travelled far and were hungry. He alighted on a branch of the tree and watched them, and as he could work magic he cast a spell over the pot, so that the meat should not be cooked till he wished. The fire burnt up brightly under the pot, and the wood crackled and glowed with the heat, but the water would not boil, and the meat would not get done. The poor gods began to wonder when they should get their dinner. Then the Eagle called out to them, 'What will you give me if I make your pot boil?' 'A share of the meat,' answered they. With that the water began to bubble in the pot, and the lid to rattle up and down with the steam, and ere long the meat was nicely cooked.

11. Loke is Caught by the Giant.—Loke, one of the three gods, took the pot off the chain and lifted the lid, when down swooped the Eagle and caught up the four quarters of the ox, the best and biggest part of the meat, in his talons, leaving the hungry gods only the head and ribs to pick at. He was just about flying off with his prey when Loke snatched up a thick pole and struck him a good hard blow on the back. But that did not stop him; off he flew, and by his magic

24 OLD STORIES FROM BRITISH HISTORY.

power the pole stuck fast to his back, and Loke's hands stuck fast to the pole. And as he had so much to carry, he flew along heavily



LOKE AND THE GIANT.

close to the ground, so that the unlucky Loke was dragged along with his feet striking against rocks and stones and stumps, while his face

was scratched by the bushes and brambles. He begged loudly for mercy, but the giant would not let him go till he promised to bring him the Apples of Youth.

12. How the Apples of Youth were Stolen.

—Now these apples were very much prized by the gods, for it was by eating them that they kept always young and strong. They were in the care of a goddess named *Idwyn*. Loke was very cunning, so he let no one know what he had promised. But he went to *Idwyn* and told her that he had found some beautiful apples in a wood just outside the land of the gods, and that he was sure they were even finer than those she had. *Idwyn* was simple enough to take her apples and go with him to see. For she thought that by setting them beside the others, she would easily prove to him that none could be so fine as hers. When she got to the wood *Daze* was waiting for her, and he soon carried her off to Giantland. In a short time the gods missed *Idwyn* and her apples, and found themselves growing old and greyheaded. What was to be done? They held a meeting to find out what had become of her. And then it came out that she had been seen going out of the gods' land with Loke, and that since that day no one

had set eyes on her. Loke was made to confess his wickedness, and he was told that, unless he brought Idwyn and her apples back at once, he should smart for his crime.

13. The Giant is Killed.—So he borrowed a hawk's skin and wings, and away he went to Daze's house. Luckily the giant was out fishing, so Loke caught up Idwyn in his talons and flew homeward as fast as he could. But before he had gone very far, Daze came home and missed Idwyn. He soon guessed what had happened, took his eagle-shape, and started after Loke. He flew so fast, and made such mighty strokes with his broad wings, that he was close behind Loke as they came in sight of the gates of the gods' city. But all the gods were out on the walls watching, and, when they saw how things were going, they brought out heaps of dry shavings and laid them along the top of the wall. And as soon as Loke and Idwyn had flown over, they set fire to these shavings. Daze was so close behind the run-aways and flying so fast that he could not stop himself, but flew plump into the middle of the blaze. The fire caught his wings and burnt off the feathers, and down he came tumbling to the ground inside the gods' city; and before he could get up the gods slew him.

14. What was done with the Giant's Eyes.
—Now Giant Daze had a daughter called *Scathe*, and she put on her father's helmet and coat of mail, and took sword and spear, and came to the city of the gods to punish them for her father's death. But the gods soothed her with fair words, and it was agreed that she should choose one of them to be her husband. Moreover, they were to make her laugh, for she had never been able to laugh all her life. So she was married, and at the wedding Loke played such funny tricks that she began to laugh heartily. But what pleased her most of all was, that the king of the gods put the eyes of her dead father Daze into the sky. And there they shine for evermore. *Scathe's* husband was the god of riches, and he lived by the sea, but *Scathe* wished to live at her father's house in the waste hills, among the wild beasts. So they agreed to change houses every ten days, and thus each was pleased in turn. Her husband was glad when it was the day for leaving the hills, and sang—

Just nine nights on the hills I've slept,
But, oh, it seemed so long !
Far better than the wolf's long howl
I love the swan's sweet song.



GIANT DAZE AT HOME.

But Scathe could not bear the sea, and when she was going up to the hills again she sang—

I cannot sleep beside the sea :
The gulls they shriek and cry ;
The seamews wake me every morn
As they flit screaming by.

15. The Seven Sisters and the Wagon and Horses.—There is a tiny knot of stars near the Bull called the *Seven Sisters*, or the Hen and Chickens. When they were seen in the spring people knew that the storms of winter were past, and that the time had come for going fishing or for travelling over sea. So they were sometimes called the *Sailing Stars*. You can only see six stars in the knot now, but it is said that once upon a time there were seven. Among many nations there are stories telling how the seventh star got lost, but the old English tale about them has been forgotten.

There is only one more star-cluster to be spoken of now, and that is the one best known of all. It is always to be seen in the cloudless night sky, and it is very clear and bright. We call it the *Wagon and Horses*, or the *Cart and Oxen*. Four big stars in a square mark the two side wheels and the ends of the wagon, and three in a row the horses or oxen

that draw it. And above the middle horse is a tiny star—the Driver. He is called Thumbkin, or Tom Thumb, because he is so small that it is rather hard to see him. Many of you know stories about Tom Thumb. How his mother lost him, and how he was found again and went to court, and became a famous fellow. So I need not tell you more of him and his wagon and team.

16. The English became Christians.—It was just about two hundred years after the English had first settled in Britain that there came to them clergymen from Rome and Ireland and Scotland, to teach them and to preach the new faith. The English were glad to hear their words, and learn the good and useful arts they taught them. And when they saw that these teachers were earnest, upright men, who thought little of pain, or care, or toil if they could only win folks over to think as they did, they followed their teaching and became Christians. After the English had become Christians, there lived in an abbey—a house of religious people—in Northumberland, a clergyman named Bede. He was a wise man, and wrote many books about things which he thought it would be useful for Englishmen to know. But the best

book he wrote is his History of the Christian People of England down to his own day. In it he tells how the English shook off heathen ways, and speaks of the lives and deeds of many good men of all ranks—kings and clergymen, rich and poor—whom he had known or heard of.

17. Cadmon, the Horse-tender.—This is one of the stories he tells. There lived in Yorkshire, as servant of an abbey there, a man named Cadmon, who had charge of the horses. He was a kind-hearted, thoughtful man, but was not believed to have any knowledge or skill above the common. He could neither sing nor play on the harp, as most of his friends and neighbours had learnt to do. And this vexed him a good deal, for it often happened, when there was a merry-making among them, that one of them would say, ‘Bring in the harp, and everyone shall sing his song and play in his turn to amuse the company.’ And the harp would be passed round, and each man would sing in turn, and everyone would praise the man who had sung last. But when the harp came near Cadmon, he would get up for shame before his turn to sing and play came, and leave the company, even though the merry-making were not half over.

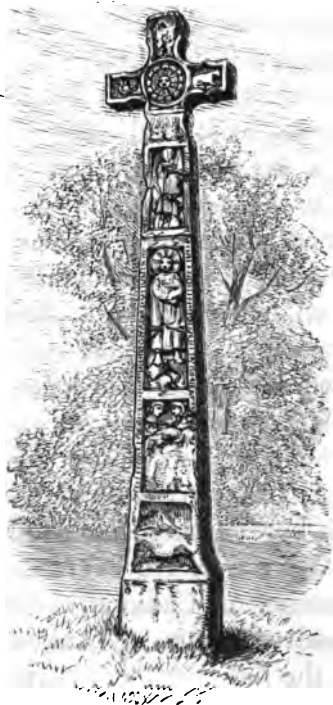
One night this had happened, and poor Cadmon had come back to the stable where he slept, and laid him down and fallen asleep. As he slept he had a wonderful dream. He thought that a man whom he did not know came to him, and greeted him, and said, 'Sing me something, Cadmon.' Upon which he answered, 'I do not know how to sing, and it is just because I could not sing that I left the company to-night, and came home here to bed.' But the man said, 'For all that you must sing to me.' 'What shall I sing about then?' said Cadmon. 'Sing of the beginning of all things,' replied the man. And with that Cadmon began to sing a beautiful song he had never heard before. The first words of it were—

Let us magnify meetly the Master of Heaven ;
The might of the Maker, the thoughts of His mind.

When he woke, strange to tell, he not only remembered what he had sung in his sleep, but was able to go on with the song, and put fresh verses to it as easily as if he had been a poet all his life.

18. Cadmon becomes a Poet.—He wondered very much at this gift which he had got in so strange a way ; and, when the day broke,

he went to the steward of the farm and made known to him what had happened. The steward took him to the lady who was at



THE RUTHWELL CROSS.

the head of the abbey, and there, before her and the learned men who lived there, he told his dream and sang his song. They

thought that he had gotten a gift from God ; but, to prove him, they told him a story out of the Bible which he had never heard—for there were no English Bibles in those days for Cadmon to read. And they bade him turn what they had told him into verse, and say it to them the next day. On the morrow Cadmon came back, and sang them a fine poem which he had made out of what they had told him the day before. Then the lady said he must make good use of the gift he had. So he left his stable and became one of the brethren in the abbey. And bit by bit he learnt nearly all the Bible stories, and put them into verse. Everyone was eager to learn his verses, and they spread far and wide, and some of them we still have written in old parchment books. At Ruthwell, a place near the English border, there is a tall stone cross to be seen, on which are carved some verses, and the name of Cadmon. Cadmon died twelve hundred years ago, about the time that Bede, the historian, was born.

19. Bede's Last Illness.—Bede was a man who never liked to be idle for a moment. He was regular and true to time in all his daily duties, and every hour that he could spare from his work as a clergyman he spent in

reading and writing. For he said that he wished to leave books which might be useful to those that came after him. He died at Jarrow, where he had lived all his life, and there you may still see part of the old church in which he so often preached and prayed, and a chair, which is said to have been his. A faithful account of his death is given by one of the friends who was with him in his last hours. It shows very well what kind of man Bede was. He fell ill about a fortnight before he died, and, feeling that his time was short, he tried to make the most of every minute that was left him. One of the chief things he did during these days was to turn the Gospel of John into English. The day before he died he grew weaker, and found it hard to breathe. But he was still cheerful, and passed the morning dictating the Gospel to a little boy named Wilbert, who wrote down the verses, one by one, as fast as Bede turned them into English. Now and again, as Wilbert wrote, Bede would say, 'Get on as quickly as you can, for I do not know how soon I may be gone.'

20. Bede's Death.—On the day he died, Wednesday, May 9th, 742, he worked all the morning as before, and reached the last

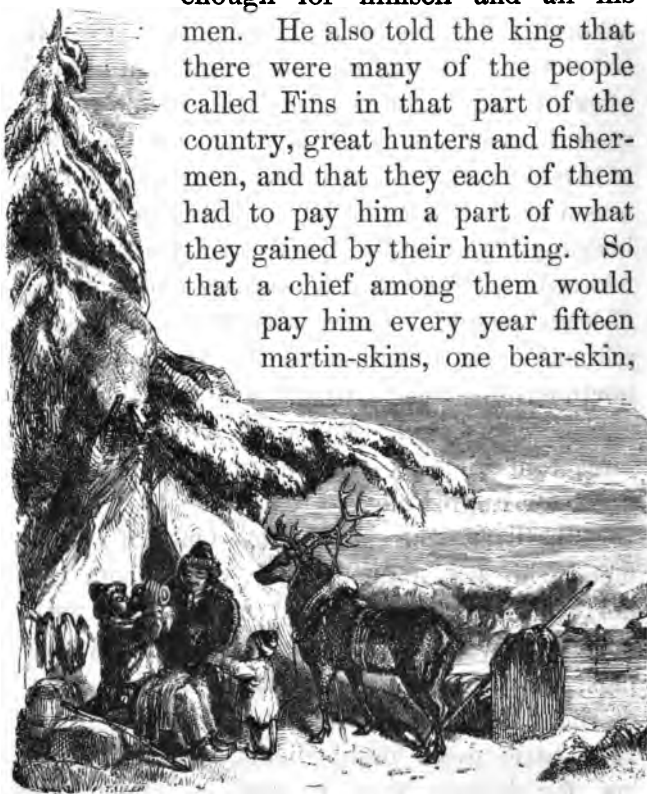
chapter. Before that was quite finished he turned to a friend and said: 'I have a few small treasures here in my little box. Do you go quickly and call together to my room the brothers of the abbey, that I may share all I have among them.' And when they were come to his bedside, he spoke cheerfully and kindly to them one and all, and gave each of them some little gift. And they wept to see that he would soon be gone from among them, but they were glad to know that he was not afraid to die. When the bell rang for the evening service, the boy, Wilbert, said to him, 'Dear Master, still there is one verse to be written.' 'Then write quickly,' said Bede, and told him the words to put down. 'Now it is finished!' said the boy, as he laid down his pen. 'Yes, it is finished,' Bede said; 'and now lift my head and hold me up, so that I may turn my eyes toward the church where I have been used to pray.' And, as the boy was holding him up, he breathed his last, with a prayer on his lips.

21. King Alfred.—King Alfred, who lived one hundred and fifty years after Bede's death, thought so highly of his History, that he wished all English people should be able to read it. And as it was in Latin, a tongue

which few understood, he himself was at the pains to turn it into English for their use. Of King Alfred himself there is much worth telling. He was a man who was greatly beloved in his lifetime and highly honoured after his death, for he spent the whole of his reign in trying to do all he could for the good of his people. He had been abroad when he was a little boy, and he was always fond of hearing about other lands, and learning all he could of the ways and doings and wisdom of their people. There were two sea-captains whom he sent to sail along the North Sea and north-eastern coasts to learn about the land and people there. And what these two captains told him he wrote down and put into a book for Englishmen to read.

22. Otter, the Merchant.—One of these men, who was named Otter, came from the north of Norway. He told Alfred that, with only twenty sheep, twenty oxen, and twenty pigs, he was the richest man in that part of the country. He said, too, that he grew very little grain in his fields, and that was rye for bread, because neither wheat nor barley would grow so far north. But his wealth lay in his great herd of reindeer, of which he had more than seven hundred.

And these useful beasts yielded him butter and cheese, and milk and meat, and leather enough for himself and all his men. He also told the king that there were many of the people called Fins in that part of the country, great hunters and fishermen, and that they each of them had to pay him a part of what they gained by their hunting. So that a chief among them would pay him every year fifteen martin-skins, one bear-skin,

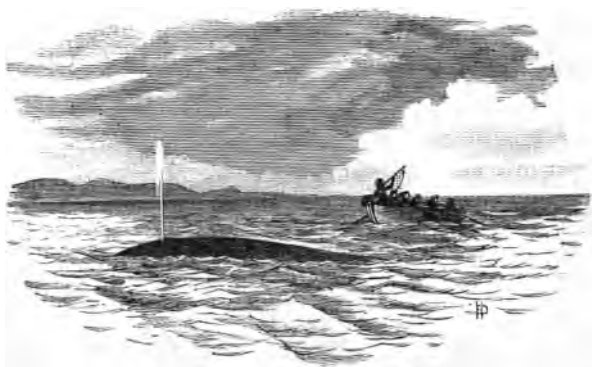


REINDEER.

two otter-skins, five reindeer pelts, two weights of the fine small feathers which we call eider-

down, and two ropes made of walrus-hide. And these goods he used to bring in his ship to England and sell for such things as he needed.

23. Whale Fishery and Seal-hunting.—Otter said, too, that there were many whales in the sea near where he lived, some even seventy-five feet long or more, which he and



WHALE-FISHING.

his men would hunt and kill for their meat, oil, and bones. Whale-fishers in those days were not obliged to go to the far North in great ships with guns to shoot the whales, for the whales had not been frightened away from the coasts of the North Sea. So when the fishermen saw a school of whales (as a flock of these beasts is called) near the shore, they

used to row out to sea as fast as they could to get behind them. And as soon as they



WAIKUS-HUNTING.

had got the school between themselves and the shore, they would whoop and shout, and

make as much noise as they could to drive the timid whales into the shallow water. And when the poor beasts had swum so close to the shore that they could not get away, they killed them with spears, and harpoons, and lances. In the Faroes, a tiny group of islands which you will find in your map to the north-west of Scotland, they still hunt whales in this way, just as Otter and his men did in the old time. Otter also told King Alfred that they used to hunt and kill the seals and walruses that came to the coast in summer, from whose hides the best of ropes were made for rigging ships and boats. For in those days there was no wire rope, and chains were not put to such uses. And he told the king that the tusks of the walruses and nar-whales were the finest of ivory, and that he sold them to the English and French merchants to be made into caskets and cups, and sword-hilts and chessmen, and many other beautiful things. And Otter gave one of the biggest tusks he had to King Alfred. So you see, even in those far-off days, just as now, trade was carried on between different parts of the world. Savages were hunting wild beasts in the wilderness to get the furs which merchants bore over the stormy

sea to richer lands for the wear of gentle-folks, taking back with them to the wild countries sharp steel weapons, and fine linen, and clothes, and jewels, and wine, and such other things as could not be found there. So that both got what they wanted, and were the better for the trade. The merchant, too, made his gain, for he charged the men to whom he sold his goods a little more than what he gave for them, that he might have money enough to buy food with and pay his crew, and keep his wife and children and household in comfort.

24. Little Nesting.—King Alfred was fond of hunting when he was a young man. After he came to be king he was too busy to hunt for amusement, but he would sometimes go out with his horses and hounds to get fresh meat, venison or game, for his household. One day, as he was riding through a wood with his huntsmen, he heard a cry from a tall tree that stood on a rock, not very far from his path. He bade one of his men go to the tree, and see what it was that was making the noise. The man went to the tree and found that the cry came from a great eagle's nest of sticks that lay on a fork of the branches some way from the ground. He climbed up, and

to his great surprise saw a little child lying in the bottom of the nest. It was wrapped in a purple cloth, and had tiny gold coils round its little arms. The man took it up carefully and carried it down to the king. Alfred sent it home to his house, and gave it to the women to be taken care of. It was called Nesting because it had been found in the eagle's nest, for the king never got to know whose child it was, or who had put it into the tree. And the child grew up and became a man, and served the king and his sons after him well and worthily.

25. Children in the Olden Times.—Old English books do not often speak of children, so that we do not know much about them, but some things which we do know may be set down here. Children of free-people (for you must know that there were slaves in England in those days) were dressed after the same way as their mothers and fathers, but they nearly always went barefooted and bare-headed. Their hair was carefully combed and braided, and left to grow all its length, for it was only slaves that had their hair cut short. They wore a little string of beads of glass or gold or silver round their necks, and their throats and arms were tattooed

just as you may see sailors tattooed nowadays. The girls no doubt played with dolls made of rags or wood, and made believe to do washing and cooking and spinning and flax-dressing, and other things which they saw their mothers busy about. When they were old enough they learnt how to spin and sew and embroider, and cook and do household work. The boys used to play at football and hockey, and sliding and skating, and at trundling rings and hoops. They were fond of wrestling, tumbling, leaping, and turning head over heels, and the like ; and sometimes they played at being soldiers or huntsmen or shepherds. They used, too, to have matches at nine-men's morris, and at marbles and knuckle-bones. And there was always sport out of doors : feeding the beasts, playing with the dogs, bird-nesting, fishing, or the like ; for there were no towns so big but that a boy could get out into the fields in a few minutes. But he might not go far, for there were wolves and other fierce beasts roaming about even close to the cities, so that it was not safe for a child to stray out of sight of a house.

26. Wild Beasts in England.—One story will show you the dangers of the woods in those days. There was a king of England,

named Edgar, one of Alfred's great grandchildren, who fought against a king of the Welsh, for the Welsh and Scots had kings



WOLVES AND SHEEP.

of their own in those days. The English king, Edgar, beat the Welsh king, and, as a mark of his victory, made the Welsh king

promise to pay him 300 wolves' heads every year. You may be sure the shepherds and herdsmen were glad of this, for the wolves did great damage to their flocks and herds, breaking into the folds by night, worrying the sheep, or killing the weak and young among the cattle. The Welsh king and his men had many a hunt to get the heads to send to England, and for two years they duly paid the English king. But in the third year they could not find enough wolves in Wales, for they had killed nearly all of them. So the English king forgave them their debt. Now, if there were so many wolves in Wales, there were no doubt a good many more in England. It is now long since wolves were killed out of England, but in Ireland and Scotland they were to be found less than one hundred and fifty years ago.

27. Hunting in the Olden Times.—So that in those days hunting was not a mere sport as it now is in England, but men were obliged to hunt to kill the wild beasts, just as they are now in many parts of the world. Another reason why men hunted them was to get change of food. For as there was little hay it was not possible to keep much cattle through the winter, and so folk had to live on salt-

meat, which was neither pleasant nor healthy, unless they were able to get other food now and again. For if people live long on salt-meat alone they fall ill, and suffer dreadful pain from an illness called *scurvy*. But fresh vegetables and fresh meat will prevent such an illness ; so it is very seldom you hear of it in England nowadays, though in the olden times it was not uncommon. And till people found out the right way to ward off this ailment sailors on long voyages often died of it, as you will see if you read the ‘Story of Anson,’ the brave English captain who sailed round the world in 1740.

28. Lessons and Schooling.—You will like to know what boys had to learn in the olden times. If they were workmen’s sons they had to learn their father’s trade or craft as soon as they were old enough to handle hammer or saw. If they were farmers’ sons they had to learn to plough and reap, and thrash and mow, and tend cattle and sheep. If they were gentlefolks’ sons they had to learn to fence and ride, and to do soldier’s duty, and to know the law. For when they were grown up they would have to serve in the king’s guard, or to be captains in the army when it was called out, and to go to court and act

as judges or lawyers or jurymen. Only those boys who were going to be clergymen were taught any book-learning beyond reading and writing. But clergymen had to learn Latin, and singing, and how to read and understand the books of learned men. So, like the boy Wilbert, who was Bede's little clerk, they were set to their book early. We have some of the old parchment lesson-books they used, out of which the master read the lesson to the pupil, who had to get it by heart. There is a set of questions and answers in one of these books. Here are some of them: 'Q. What is snow?—A. Dried water. Q. What is a letter?—A. A silent messenger. Q. Describe the moon.—A. The moon is the eye of night, the giver of dew, the foreteller of the weather. Q. I know a certain thing that flies. It has an iron beak, a wooden body, and a feathered tail, and it carries death with it. What is it?—A. An arrow. Q. Describe a ship.—A. It is a house that moves, an inn that travels with its guests, a wayfarer that leaves no footprints behind him.' In another lesson-book of those days is a map of the world, which is copied here. You will see that it is very unlike the maps of the world you know, and that America is

not on it at all, for it was not then known. It is certain that lesson-books are more correct and useful now than they were then, though they are perhaps not quite so amusing.



OLD ENGLISH MAP OF THE WORLD.

29. Eating and Drinking.—In another book, the master asks, ‘What do you get to eat?’ And the boy answers, ‘Meat, and herbs, and fish, and butter, and cheese, and beans.’ ‘And what to drink?’ ‘Water,’ replies the boy; ‘but beer when I am able to get it.’ It was common in those days for well-to-do folk to have fish and milk for dinner three days a week—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. The other days they would

have bacon and beans, with beer; and on Sundays fresh meat and kale if it could be got. Poor folk had to be content with porridge, and black bread made of rye, and skim-milk all the year round, and sometimes a little broth of herbs and meat, and at harvest time a dish of broiled herring, but they seldom tasted fresh roast meat. At holiday times there was a good deal of eating and drinking, and there were different kinds of food fixed for every feast in the year: sweet porridge at Christmas, eggs at Easter, buns on Good Friday, goose at Michaelmas, and so on. But there were many things unknown to Englishmen in those days, which we should not like to go without now. Neither tea, nor coffee, nor sugar, nor potatoes, nor oranges were known in England till hundreds of years after the days we are talking of. So that, as far as eating and drinking goes, the good old days were by no means so good as the days we live in.

30. Silly Beliefs.—In the old days, too, people, even after they were Christians, were often frightened and unhappy by reason of their foolish fancies and silly beliefs. They were afraid to walk about at night for fear of ghosts, and witches, and fairies, and bogies,

and many other things which do not exist at all. They believed in spells and charms, which can do no good whatever. They even tried to foretell what was to happen by thinking over their dreams, or looking at the stars, or the marks on sheep's blade-bones, or casting lots, which could never be of the slightest use. But all those things they did in secret, because the Christian clergyman told them that they were not only foolish but wrong. And little by little the wiser and better among them cast off these silly fancies, and laughed at them, as all sensible people now do. They had many strange ideas too about doctoring themselves, and they took strange things to cure illness. If a child had a fever, they would put him on the roof of the house to drive the witches away, who, as they thought, had made him ill. They would wear a wolf's hair in a bag hung round their neck to cure ague, and drink a broth made of snake's flesh to strengthen their lungs. They thought that warts and boils and sprains could be charmed away by saying a string of rhymes over the bad place. All these things seem very laughable to us, but it was a long while before people left off such foolish practices, and found out the

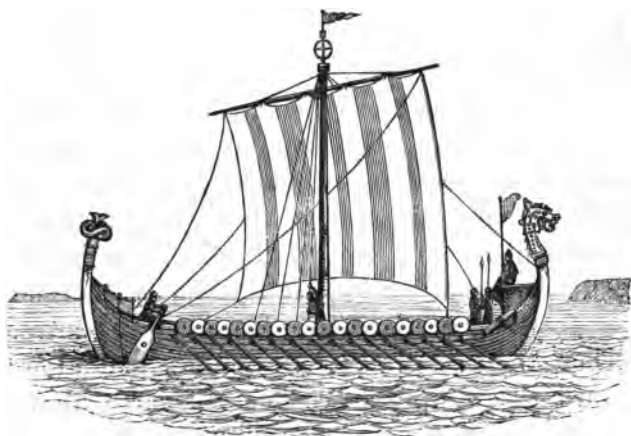
right way to treat sick people, and the fit drugs to give them to cure their illness. It was a bad thing to be ill in the old days, for there were no fine hospitals with kindly nurses and skilful, painstaking doctors, and no ways of lulling pain or of bringing sleep to those who were suffering. Even kings and queens in those days could not get the care that a poor man nowadays may have when he is hurt or ill.

31. **The Danes.**—King Alfred, of whom you have read before, had a very uneasy reign. In his time a fierce and warlike host of soldiers and sailors, under leaders called Sea-Kings, came across the North Sea, from Norway and Denmark, and won a great part of England, and settled down here to live. These people are known as *the Danes*. They lived in lands less fruitful and rich than England, and when they heard that the English coast was not guarded, and that the English land was so fair and pleasant, they set out in great fleets and came here to win plunder, and a new home for themselves. We can tell what these Danes were like, because we have some of their songs and stories, and many of their weapons and jewels and other things have been found in the ground. When a

Danish sea-king died, his people dressed him in his best clothes, put his helmet on his head, set his shield on his arm and his sword in his hand, and laid him on board his ship, which they dragged ashore. Then they killed his wife and slaves, and favourite horses and hounds, and laid them by him, with gold and silver and jewels, so that he might not lack in the other life any of the comfort he had been used to in this. For they were heathens, as the English had once been, and thought that when a man died his soul lived another life, very like the life he had left. Just as the Red Indians still believe that when they die they will go to a Happy Hunting Ground, to pass their time for ever in fighting or hunting or feasting, as they do when they are alive. Then they set fire to the bodies, and afterward threw up a huge heap of earth above them, covering ship and all, and this mound was for a sign and a memory of the dead king for ever.

32. The Sea-King's Grave.—Not long ago in Norway a great mound near the sea was opened. Inside it was found a fine ship of oak, which had kept sound and unhurt under the earth for hundreds of years, and in a cabin on the deck of it were the bones of a

king. The ship was dug out carefully and taken to the chief town of Norway, and there it is still to be seen. It is most likely one of the very vessels in which the Danes sailed to England. In this country on the high downs you sometimes see a heap of earth and stones called a 'barrow,' and that is all that is left



A DANISH SHIP OF WAR.

of such a burial-place. But as the heathen English were not much busied on the sea, we do not find ships or boats inside mounds in England.

33. A Danish War-Ship.—You have, perhaps, been at the sea-side and seen ships and boats; if so you will easily understand what

kind of ships the Danes used, but if not you must look at the cut, and try and make out what you can from it and from my words. You will see that it is a long boat with a deck fore and aft—that is, in the bows and at the stern. It has no deck in the waist or midships, but is lower there, so that the rowers can use their oars better. In those days, before steam engines were known, even war-ships like this had to use oars when there was a calm or a bad wind. She has one large mast with a square sail, and she is steered by a large oar fixed to one side of the stern. At her bows is a fine carved figure-head, with the fierce jaws of a snake or dragon gaping towards the enemy. On either side the ship is a row of shields, behind which the men who are rowing are safe from the splashing of the sea, or the arrows and spears of their enemies. The figure-head is gilt, the shields are painted black and red and yellow; the ship is tarred black, with streaks of red and yellow round her bulwarks. Her sail is striped red and white and green, so that she looks very gay and bright. If you had seen her when the men were rowing, and the sun shining upon her gilded figure-head, you would have thought her some winged dragon swimming along over

the sea. The crew on board her were picked men, and they were bound to be good sailors. For in the North Sea there are often dreadful storms, when it needs bold hearts and skilled hands to save a ship from being overwhelmed by the raging waves, or driven ashore and wrecked upon the sharp rocks or shallow sands of the coast. They were good soldiers too, boasting that they would never turn their backs before twice their own number. Well drilled and quick, too, they were to obey their captain, whether he bade them drive off an enemy by shooting arrows or flinging spears, or called them to follow him, sword in hand, into the midst of the fray. But with all their bravery and skill they were often cruel and pitiless. For though they had learnt to be true to their friends, and to die rather than show a faint heart, they had not learnt that it is wicked to fight, save in a good cause, such as to shelter the weak against the strong, or to uphold the right, or to defend oneself against evil doers. Yet these Danes were not mere brave savages, for they were honest and hard-working, and truthful, and warm-hearted, and did their duty as far as they knew it.

34. **King Guthrum and his Vow.**—You shall have a story about one of these sea-

kings of theirs that had led men to England. There he had fought with the English kings, and won from Alfred part of the land for himself, and gained much riches, and made a great name as a brave and lucky leader. His name was Guthrum. He had married an English wife, a wise and good woman, who is still remembered in Denmark. In his old age King Guthrum sat at home in his hall, while his sons went to war. His eldest son was a fine young man, and the old king loved him so dearly, that he vowed he would slay the man who brought him news of any evil having befallen him. However, sad to tell, this young prince and his brother fell out and fought, and the elder was slain. A messenger came home to King Guthrum's palace and told the queen what had happened, for he was afraid to speak the evil tidings to the king because of his oath. So the queen planned a way of letting her husband know about it. She rose up early in the morning, and had the great hall where the king used to sit hung about with dark cloth, instead of the bright hangings that were wont to deck the walls. Then she sat down on her great carved chair by the side of the king's seat, and waited sorrowfully enough till the king should come in.

35. The King hears the News.—By and by Guthrum walked into the hall, and when he saw the walls draped with black, and the mournful faces of the queen and the nobles, he said, ‘Is there any news?’ Then the queen stood up and spoke: ‘My Lord, you had two hawks, one white, the other grey. They were both handsome and bold and fearless. They were swift on the wing, and they never missed their prey. And it was a joy to you to see them hunt and strike their quarry. But they both flew away from you. The white hawk flew off into the wilderness, and there came a flock of crows against him. And they set upon him and plucked out his feathers, and mangled him so that he fell and died. But as for the grey hawk, he is come home again to you to kill birds for your table!’ Then the old king understood what had happened, and he said, ‘Denmark is drooping; my son must be dead!’ And the queen answered him; ‘You have said what no one would have dared to tell you, and it is true.’ Then the old man sank down in the king’s seat exceeding sorrowful. He could not move or speak for grief, nor was there any that could comfort him. And so sore was his sorrow that on the next day, at the same hour that he had heard

the news, he died there in the hall, sitting in his chair.

36. The Bad King Ethelred.—After the time of Alfred and Guthrum, the Danes left England at peace for about sixty years, but at last, in the days of King Ethelred, they began to come here again, and plunder the land as they had done before. Ethelred was a selfish, cruel, and foolish man, who only cared for his own ease and pleasures, and left the rule of his realm to wicked men who had won their way to his favour. So that the land was not rightly guarded, and the Danes were able to sail round the coasts and land where they liked, without fear of the English fleet or army. Sometimes the king would gather a fleet against them, but when the ships and men were all ready, he would idle away the time till it was too late to do anything. Afterwards, when the Danes had done all the harm they could, he would pay them large sums of money to go away. So that, what with the damage they underwent from the Danes and the heavy taxes they had to pay the king, the poor English were in a sad plight. Many people were killed, many were taken prisoners and sold as slaves, many lost all they had.

They saw their houses, barns, and shops sacked and burnt, and their horses driven away and cattle and sheep slaughtered to feed the Danes. All their gold and silver and jewels too were carried off as booty. There was hardly a place in England that was not overrun and plundered during the reign of Ethelred.

37. Anlaf gets his Famous Dog.—Among the chief captains of the hosts of the invaders, the best of all was King Anlaf, who is better worth reading of than the weak and wretched Ethelred. He and his men were once sailing off the Irish coast when they ran short of meat, so they landed and marched into the country, taking all the sheep and cattle they could find. When they had got together a great herd they hastened back to their ships, meaning to sail away with their spoil before the Irishmen could gather in arms to attack them. As they were on the road to the shore, there came a farmer to King Anlaf begging him to give him back his cows. Anlaf was sorry for the man, though he was his enemy, and he told him that he might have his cows if he could pick them out of the herd. ‘But,’ said he, ‘you must not delay us on our way.’ The farmer had a big sheep-dog with him, and he

at once turned it into the drove. The dog ran through the whole herd, in which there were many hundred head of cattle, and soon drove out of it just the number of cows which the farmer had told the king he owned. And all of them were marked in the self-same way, so it was very clear that the dog must have picked out the right beasts. The king and his men wondered at the dog's wisdom, and Anlaf asked the farmer if he would give him the dog. 'Willingly,' answered he. Whereon the king gave him a gold ring in return for his gift, and promised to befriend him if ever he stood in need of his help. The dog's name was Soldier, and the king kept him always with him as long as he lived.

38. The Dog Steers the King's Ship.—One day as Anlaf was steering his famous ship, the *Long Serpent*, and Soldier was lying at his feet, watching him as if he understood everything that his master was doing, one of the king's followers, a good poet, was standing by. 'Come, poet,' said Anlaf, 'and take your turn at the helm.' 'I can't steer, sir,' answered he. 'Then you must find someone to steer for you while you make a verse. Whom do you choose?' 'Well, I think your dog, Soldier, could steer quite as well as I

can.' 'We will try him,' said the king; 'but you must be quick over your verse, for he has not been used to such work, and the



DOG STEERING.

wind is blowing hard.' Then Anlaf made the dog stand up and put his feet on the tiller, as if he were steering, but he himself

took up a huge oar or sweep, and steered the ship with that, while the poet was making his verse. And this is what he made—

The smooth-bladed oar is tugged through the water,
While the rudder is swaying to and fro in the foam,
For the king's at the oar, and his dog is the helmsman;
As through the cold ocean the *Serpent* swims home.

When the sailors heard that the dog, Soldier, had been steering the great ship, they made merry over it, you may be sure, and said that he could do everything but speak.

39. *Soldier's Death.*—King Anlaf did not live many years. His enemies set upon him at sea with a great fleet, while he had only a few ships with him, for he had not been warned of their coming. After a dreadful battle, when there was not a man aboard the *Serpent* but was wounded or slain, the king, seeing that the day was lost, threw himself into the sea that he might not come alive into the hands of his foes. These men took the *Serpent*, and sailed her back to Norway. When they reached the harbour and the ship was moored to the pier, one of King Anlaf's men went up to Soldier, who ever since the battle began had been lying on the fore deck waiting for his master's

orders. He looked sadly at the dog, and said: 'Ah! Soldier, we have no master now!' With that the dog sprang up, howling and whining as if he had been struck to the heart, and ran ashore. He climbed to the top of a high mound looking over the sea, and there he lay down. Food and water were brought to him, but he would not touch them, though he drove away the birds and beasts that came to steal them. And there he lay with the tears rolling down his face as he wept for his master till, in a few days, he died.

40. The Merciful Soldier.—When Anlaf made peace with King Ethelred, he went away from England, because he had promised never to make war upon Englishmen again. But King Swain, the Dane, who had been with him did not make any promise. Indeed, he went on fighting against Ethelred till he drove him out of the land, and won the crown for himself. In these wars many evil deeds were done on either side, for there were few men in those days who showed pity or mercy to their foes. But among Swain's captains there was a man named Thorwald, who was more merciful and righteous than any soldier of his day. He was so well liked by his

comrades that, when they brought home their booty from the wars, they would give him anything he chose out of it. But he would never take the silver or gold, or rich raiment or arms, but would ask them for one or two of their prisoners. And these he would set free, sending them home to their friends without any ransom or reward, instead of selling them as slaves. When Swain was still a young captain, before he became King of England, it is told that he and Thorwald landed in Wales, and marched up into the country; but the Welshmen came against them and cut them off from their followers, and took them both prisoners. All night they lay in a dungeon in no happy plight, but early next day there came thither a Welsh nobleman, who called for Thorwald to be brought out to him. 'Thorwald,' said he, 'when your soldiers took my son captive, you set him free and sent him home safe to me. I am glad to be able to make a return for your kindness. Your ransom is paid, and you are free.' 'My lord,' said Thorwald, 'I thank you heartily for your good-will, but I cannot go away, leaving my comrade, Swain, in bonds. But if you will pay his ransom, I will gladly bear all the

cost thereof.' Then, for Thorwald's sake, the nobleman had Swain also taken out of prison, and sent them both back together to their countrymen.

41. Swain's Gratitude.—Years afterwards, when Swain was a great king and was sitting with two other princes at a feast, one of them said to him, 'It is not often that three such guests as we are meet at one table!' 'No,' answered Swain, 'but if we were to reckon only those great who are worthy, I know a poor gentleman's son who is worth us three kings together.' 'What is the name of this wonderful man?' they asked. Whereon Swain told them the story of Thorwald and of his kindness to himself. And he bore witness to his noble heart, saying that he was as brave as the boldest soldier, as gentle and honourable as the greatest king, and as good and wise as the most learned sage! The old books have more to tell of Thorwald, and bear out what the king said. They set forth how he preached the Gospel to his heathen fellow-countrymen, and many other things too long to set down here. After a life of travel, he died in a strange land, away from his own kith and kin, and a poet brought home the news in this verse—

Christ has given Thorwald rest. I have been where he
lies still,
Far away at Dram, in Russia, by St. John's Church on
the hill.

42. **The Sack of Canterbury.**—In the days when Swain and his son, Canute, were trying to win England from Ethelred, Thurkell the tall came up the Thames from over the North Sea with a fleet of ships to join them in fighting against the English, and to gain what he could for himself. He and his men moored their ships and landed, and made a camp on the shore, and then took horses from the farms near and rode all over the countryside plundering and burning. Not a few of the English took shelter in the town of Canterbury, and the Danes were not able for a long time to break into it, for it was strongly walled, and there were many stout-hearted men inside who could guard it. But at last a wicked traitor betrayed it to Thurkell and his host, and they broke in. Many poor people were killed and every house was sacked. When the Danes had stayed in the town long enough to search it thoroughly they marched back to their ships, carrying with them the archbishop and all the clergy and gentlefolk as prisoners, and hundreds of

the poorer townsfolk and farmers. Great was the sorrow of Englishmen when they heard the news. They remembered that it was at Canterbury that the Roman clergymen had first preached the Gospel to their fathers, and they were sorely grieved to hear that the good archbishop was taken. One of them made these lines about it :—

In bonds is he that till to-day had been
 Head of the English Church and English folk ;
 And one might see the very depths of woe,
 Where joy was wont to be, in that poor town,
 Whence first there came to us the Law of Christ,
 And bliss for this world and the world to come.

Many of the prisoners found friends to buy them back, but those who could get no one to redeem them were sold as slaves to France and other lands over sea.

43. The Archbishop's Brave Death.—The Danes thought that the archbishop would be ready to pay for his freedom, and they fixed a large sum, which he promised to get them. But when he found that he could not get the money without taking it from the poor or the churches, he chose to stay in bonds rather than do so. The Danes kept him with them till Easter week in the next year, when, on Saturday, after a feast, they held a meeting to

see what was to be done. They sent for him and bade him pay the money he had promised them, but he told them why he could not. Said he, 'I am ready without fear to suffer any pain you choose to put me to. That I cannot carry out what I promised you is not for want of will, but because I have not enough money of my own.' They were very angry when they heard these words, and voted that he should die. Then they took up blocks of wood, and stones, and the heads and bones of the oxen they had been feasting on that afternoon, and began to throw them at him. Thurkell, their leader, was sorry for the brave old man, and he ran into the midst of them crying, 'Forbear, forbear! I pray you! Silver and gold and all that I have or can get, save my ship only, I will give you to let this man go free. Do not commit this wickedness!' However, they were heated with the wine they had been drinking, and would not listen to Thurkell, but went on pelting the helpless old man. There was one Dane there who had often talked with the archbishop since he had been a prisoner, and who had become a Christian that very morning through his teaching. This man, when he saw he could not save his teacher, thought

the best thing he could do would be to put him out of pain at once; he therefore smote him on the head with his axe, so that he fell dead to the ground without a word.

44. The Archbishop's Burial.—When he was dead the Danish soldiers were ashamed of the evil deed they had done in their drunken wrath. Thurkell and the greater part of his followers made up their minds to become Christians, and enter the service of the English king. The English did not, you may be sure, forget the brave archbishop, who had died rather than do what he thought wrong. His body was buried in St. Paul's Church in London, and there it lay for some time; but, years afterwards, when all was at peace again, the Canterbury people wished to have their archbishop buried in his own city. The Londoners said they would never give him up; so that, it is said, the bier had to be taken out of St. Paul's by stealth to prevent a riot. And now the body of the good archbishop lies on the north side of the choir at Canterbury, where you may see his tomb to this day. And on the riverside, on the spot where he fell, there is a church bearing his name. The year after the archbishop was killed, Swain became King of England, driving Ethelred out of the land.

45. **Canute, King of all England.**—King Swain did not live long, and when he was dead, after some months' fighting, all agreed to take Canute as their king. He was one of the best kings we have ever had in England, although he was not English born. He said that he would never spare himself or his pains in taking care for the needs of all his people. He kept his word, and his name has never been forgotten. He was fond of music and singing and poetry, and even made verses himself, as you shall hear. One day he and the queen were being rowed over the fens by the Isle of Ely. The brethren of the abbey there were singing the service in their great church, and the wind wafted the sweet sounds across the water to the king's boat. He stood up and called for silence in the boats, and bade his men row nearer to the isle, that he might hear the music. And it is said that he made these verses on it :—

The Ely monks sang merrily
As King Canute was rowing by ;
Row, men, to the land more near,
That we the good monks' song may hear !

And he did not forget the monks, but made fine gifts to their church, and often went to hear their services.

46. Canute and Bodge.—One cold morning, February 2, the king was at a village in the fens, and wanted to go to the Isle of Ely.



BODGE AND THE KING.

The winter had been hard and the fens were all frozen, and the only way to get to the island was by sledge. But it was a dangerous drive,

for there were places where the ice was rotten and would not bear the weight of a sledge, and in other spots there were holes and pools. The king did not know what to do—to go was to run a great risk, above all if a fog came on, and he did not like to wait. While he was doubting what was best, a poor labourer, who had got the nickname Bodge, because he was so big and stout, stood forward and offered to go before the king's sledge, and find a safe track for him. The king was pleased, and told him to start at once. So off they went, and everybody laughed, and said that where the ice would bear Bodge it would carry any weight. They reached Ely safely, and then the king called Bodge to him, and, when he found out that he was a *bondsman* or slave, he set him free with all his family as a reward. And two hundred years after this there were still people living near Ely who had sprung from Bodge, the king's guide.

47. *Canute and the Poet.*—In the days of Canute, and before and after him, there were poets who made songs of praise to kings and great men, telling of their great deeds, and got from them in return gifts and gold. For as there were few books and fewer readers in

those days, the best way to get a thing remembered was to make a good poem about it, which people would learn by heart and repeat. So that kings were glad to have their deeds put into verse, that their names and acts might be kept in mind when they themselves were dead and gone. As Canute was a rich man, and known to be open-handed and free with his money, many poets came to his court, and he took much pleasure in hearing their verses. Of one such poet, named Otter, it is told that he came to England, and waited at the door of the hall till the king should come back from evensong to go to supper. As Canute passed by he caught sight of the poet, standing there in his fine red coat and blue-hooded cloak, and he said to them that were with him, 'I see a man there who looks like a bold, dashing fellow, and I do not think he is an Englishman. Bid him come to me.' So Otter was sent for, and he walked up the hall, and stopped in front of the table at which the king was sitting with his chief men, and greeted him, and cried—

Thou that of Irish, Danes, and Scots, and English too art
king,
Beyond the very bounds of earth I'll make thy praises
ring!

48. *The Poet's Reward.*—Then Otter told the king who he was, and that he had come to bring him a poem which he had made in his honour. ‘Sit down now,’ answered Canute, ‘and eat and drink to-night; to-morrow I shall hold a high court, and then you can deliver your poem in the hearing of all.’ So a stool was set for Otter opposite the king, and he ate and drank, and was merry that night. On the morrow, when the people were gathered together, he stood up and asked for a quiet hearing, and then delivered his poem in a loud, clear voice, so that everyone could hear him. When he had finished it everyone praised his verses, and the king took off a high fur cap, trimmed with gold beads, which he wore, and, handing it to the keeper of his money, bade him fill it with silver and give it to Otter. As the king’s cap full of money was handed over men’s heads to the poet, part of the money was shaken out of it, and the pieces went rolling about Otter’s feet. He stooped to pick them up, but Canute called out, ‘Never mind your pennies, leave them to the poor; I will take care you never lack money as long as you will stay with me.’ And he took him into his service, and Otter used to sing his poems in the hall

after dinner, to the great delight of all that heard him, while the king and his men sate over their wine.

49. Canute's Wisdom.—But though Canute, like many other people, may have enjoyed to hear his great deeds talked of, he was not foolish enough to believe those that



CANUTE AND HIS COURTIERS.

flattered him, and he showed his good sense in a very striking way. He went down to the shore of Southampton Water, when the tide was just on the turn, and bade one of his wondering servants bring him a chair, and set it on the shingle below high water mark. When it was brought, Canute sat down, and raising his hand in command, shouted

to the flowing sea before him: 'Thou too, ocean, art under my rule, as much as the earth beneath my footstool. No one has ever disobeyed me without feeling my anger. Therefore, heed my words! I forbid thee to flow over my land, or to dare to touch my feet.' But the tide crept on inch by inch as it was wont to do, and soon the little waves were lapping up on Canute's footstool and splashing up over the fine shoes and fair robes that he wore. Then the king stood up and leaped back to the dry ground, and said to his men, who were watching him: 'See how vain and worthless is the power of earthly princes. Indeed there is no ruler of men, however great and mighty he may be thought, that is worthy of the name of king. That name befits only Him whose everlasting laws heaven and earth and all obey.' And from that day forth Canute would never wear his golden crown, but laid it up in a church, in memory of that day, and in honour of God Almighty.

50. *The Story of King Lear.*—Most of the stories you have read in this book tell of Englishmen, or of men from Norway or Denmark who came to live in England and became Englishmen. But many of us who are Scots or Welsh or Irish would like to hear some tale of

our forefathers too. There is no lack of these, and I will set down here as many as there is room for. First comes a story, which was written down by a Welsh clergyman more than six hundred years ago, for a son of the King of England to read. Once upon a time there was a king in Britain whose name was Lear. He had three daughters whom he dearly loved, but he loved Cordelia, the youngest, best of all. He was getting old and less able to work hard; he, therefore, bethought him of sharing his kingdom among his children. But first he would try how far they were worthy of his trust and love. So he sent for his daughters, and they came before him, as he sat on his throne in the midst of his nobles. Then he asked the eldest, 'How much do you love me?' 'More than myself,' she answered. And Lear was well pleased with her answer, and gave her a third part of his kingdom. Then he turned to his second daughter, saying, 'And how much do you love me?' And she said, 'I love you more than everything else in the whole world.' And Lear gave her likewise a third part of his kingdom. But Cordelia, who really loved her father, could not bring herself to flatter him with fair words, as her sisters

had done. Moreover she knew that they had not meant what they had said, and she was sorry to see her father deceived. She was also minded to try his love for her. So when the old king turned to her and asked her how she loved him, she answered: 'I love you as I ought, father. I will say no more than that!' But Lear was angry that she spoke so plainly, and said: 'Hitherto, I have loved you more than your sisters, but I can see very well that you do not love me as they do. You shall have no share in my kingdom. Then he parted the rest of the kingdom, which he had meant for Cordelia, between her sisters. The two rich sisters soon found husbands, and ruled as queens under their father, while Cordelia lived alone in disgrace. But the King of France, who knew Cordelia's worth, heard what had happened, and sent to ask King Lear to give him his youngest daughter to wife. King Lear sent back word to him, saying: 'I will gladly let you marry Cordelia, but she will be a penniless bride, for I have shared between her sisters all that I had.' The French king answered, 'I have land and gold of my own for both of us; I want no more from you than your daughter's hand.' So Cordelia

married the French king, and went to live in France with him. They were happy together, but it grieved her heart to think how deeply her father had misunderstood her and doubted her love.

51. The Ungrateful Daughters. — Soon after Cordelia had left England, her two elder sisters, who were cruel and greedy women, would not let their father rule with them any longer. They killed or drove away those who tried to defend him, for he was old and blind and helpless, and could not hold his own against them. They took away his crown and royal state, and turned him out of his palace. The poor king was forced to give up all he had to his ungrateful daughters, and they even begrudged the cost of keeping him and the few old servants who waited on him. The old man was heart-broken at his daughters' unkindness, and saw at last, now that it was too late, how ill he had done to trust to fair words. For some time he wandered about like a homeless beggar over the land he had so long ruled, and few dared to give him and one faithful servant food or shelter, for fear of the anger of the wicked queens. In despair Lear made up his mind to try whether Cordelia

would have mercy on him, though he was not at all sure that she would forget his former harshness to her. So he took ship for France,



ON HIS WANDERINGS.

but when he landed he was afraid to go straight to the city where his daughter lived, for he had been so cruelly used that he mis-

trusted everyone. He therefore sent his old servant to her, bidding him tell the Queen of France that her father was come to her land in great distress, hungry, ill-clad, and forsaken. Cordelia, who had heard nothing of her sisters' cruelty, wept bitterly to hear of her father's sorrows. She at once sent him money and royal raiment, and servants to wait upon him, and bade him tell her when he would be ready to see her. And on the day he named she and her husband, the King of France, went out to meet him with a great company of soldiers and followers in gay dresses, all to do Lear honour. And they led him to their palace in great state and gave him the rule of their kingdom, till he should be able to win back his own. Then they sent through France to gather a great army. And when all was ready Lear and Cordelia and the King of France crossed over to Britain with a mighty host. The ungrateful daughters and their husbands fought against them, but they were soon defeated and slain, to the joy of all that heard of it. So, by help of his true daughter Cordelia, King Lear won back his kingdom, and ruled it well till his death-day, and when he died Cordelia became queen after him. Thus, as is often shown, a good

heart was proved better than a fair tongue. It is out of this story that Shakespeare made the beautiful play called 'King Lear.'

52. How St. Patrick became a Slave.—The last stories you shall hear are taken from the life of St. Patrick, who brought the Irish to the Christian faith. Hence he is often called 'The Apostle of Ireland,' and Irishmen have always honoured him. It is in his memory that they wear a sprig of shamrock, on the 17th of March, which is the day of his birth and also of his death. Patrick was born in Scotland; his father was a clergyman, and well-to-do. The boy was brought up on a little farm in the country. When he was sixteen years old, there came a fleet of Irish pirates to the place. The robbers landed and began plundering as was their custom. When they went back to their ships with the goods they had stolen, they took with them a number of women and children, whom they meant to sell as slaves. Among these was Patrick and some of his kinsfolk.

The poor lad was carried over sea, and sold to a nobleman in the north of Ireland. He set Patrick to keep his sheep, and he was at this work for six years. A shepherd has a lonely life and plenty of time for thinking ;

and as Patrick lay out on the hills by night, watching his flock, his mind was never idle. His thoughts were often of his father and mother, and of his home, and of how he might escape from his master and get back to them. But his chief thought was about the heathen Irish. He saw that they were kindly people and willing to learn, but that they often did foolish and cruel acts, because they had never had anyone to teach them a better way of life. And this was a sorrow to him. At last, after long and weary waiting, Patrick was able to get away from his master without being seen, and to make his way to the sea shore. Here he happened to find a ship ready to sail, and the sailors let him come on board with them. And after some hardship and danger, for their food ran short, and they were all nearly starved, he got back safe to his home and his kinsfolk.

53. St. Patrick's Work.—Now that he was free and well-off once more, Patrick did not forget the needs of the Irish. He set to work at once to learn from the wisest and best men he could find, and became a clergyman. Seven years after he left Ireland a run-away slave, he went back again as a teacher in a ship of his own, with a few

friends who were willing to help him. There was a herdsman keeping cattle near the shore when Patrick first landed, and when he saw the strangers he thought they must be pirates. So he left his cattle and ran swiftly up to the house of his master, who was lord of that part of the land, and told him to make ready to defend himself. The nobleman took his sword and spear and shield, and gathered his servants and armed them, and came down to the shore to drive away the new-comers. He was much astonished when he found out who they were, and what their errand was, and welcomed them kindly to his house. So Patrick and his followers stayed awhile with him, and before they went away he had become a Christian.

From this time forth for more than fifty years Patrick went on with the work he had set himself to do, going from place to place preaching and teaching. And ere he died the greater part of the Irish had become Christians through his words. But this was not brought about without toil and danger. More than once the heathen sought to kill the new teachers. For they did not understand what Patrick wanted, and did not like to give up their old worship of wells and stones, and

trees and fairies. Nor did they, at first, like the new laws which were made by the wise men of Ireland at Patrick's advice, though they were more merciful and better than the old laws which they had before. The Irish could not read the books Patrick brought with him, for they did not know the letters. The teachers, therefore, cut the alphabet on thin flat laths of wood, about a yard long and two inches broad, and gave these to the people so that they might learn to copy the letters. At one place a heathen priest, who did not like the new faith, told his fellow-countrymen that these pieces of wood were magic swords, and the letters upon them charms and spells by which the Christians were able to secretly kill anyone they disliked. And the people believed the story, and gathered together to slay Patrick and his friends. But there was a wise man there who stood up and spoke to the mob, and showed them how foolish their fancy was, and saved the Christian teachers. And Patrick wrote a copy of the Book of Psalms with his own hand, and gave it to this wise man's son as a mark of his gratefulness. And the man who first wrote down this story, many years

after, says that he himself had seen this very book.

54. St. Patrick and the Fawn.—There was a heathen lord who lived in the north of Ireland, and he had much land. One day Patrick went to his house, and begged him to give him a little plot of land on a hill-top. For he wished to build a church there, and a little house for himself and his followers to live in. The rich man would not give him the plot he asked for, but let him have another piece of land low down the hill, and there Patrick took up his abode for a time. Shortly after this the rich man fell ill and was like to die, but suddenly his sickness left him and he was well again. He thought that Patrick, whom he took to be a wizard, must, of his good-will, have wrought this wonderful cure in return for the piece of land. So he made up his mind to please him, and sent him as a gift a large brass cauldron, big enough to hold 27 gallons. This was useful to Patrick, who had a big household of clergymen and pupils and servants to feed, for he could boil a whole sheep at once in it, as it was then the custom to do. So he took the gift gladly, saying to them that brought it, ‘I thank your master.’ But the rich man had looked for some gift

or promise from Patrick, and he was angry. So he sent his servants to fetch back the cauldron. Patrick smiled, and gave it back



ST. PATRICK AND THE FAWN.

saying, 'I thank your master.' When the rich man heard that Patrick had spoken no angry word he was sorry for his rudeness,

and he took the cauldron back to Patrick himself, saying, 'Keep it for ever, and with it I give you the land I refused you before. Come, let us go and measure it out at once.' So they went up the hill together. And when they came to the top, and were walking round the plot, they found a roe deer lying with her little fawn asleep in the thick grass. The hind leapt up in a fright and sprang off, but the fawn could not go so fast, and one of the rich man's servants caught it, and was about to kill it. But Patrick would not have it harmed, and went to it and took it up carefully in his arms, and carried it down the hill to a field below. And as he went, the mother, who had been watching a little way off, came and followed close behind him like a pet lamb; and in the field he set the fawn gently down and left them in safety together. On the hill-top Patrick built a stone church, and the altar of it still stands on the spot where the roe and her fawn were found in the grass the day the hill was given to Patrick. The church there is the most famous of all that Patrick built, and it is the chief church of Ireland to this day. Patrick was on the road to visit this church when he died before he reached it, so

he is not buried there, but at Downpatrick, which is called after him.

55. **Old English Proverbs.**—Our forefathers were fond of saws and proverbs, wise sayings that set forth a deal of homely wisdom in a few pithy words. Here are some that were in use many hundred years ago, and among them you will find several that are still in folks' mouths :—

Better one-eyed than stone-blind, and better blind than buried.

Better one apple given away than two eaten.

Brew sour and you will drink sour.

When need is highest, help is highest.

A burnt child dreads the fire.

Seldom comes loan laughing home.

Never tell thy foe when thy foot aches.

Far from eye, far from heart.

What the eye does not see, the heart does not grieve after.

Do not praise the day till the sun is down.

A wary man is a wise man.

Ill beginnings have ill endings.

He that will not when he may,

When he will he shall have nay.

Wit and wisdom are the best of baggage.

All is not gold that glitters.

You may comb an ass and crop an ass, but you cannot turn him into a riding-horse.

If you wait long enough you will have a fair wind.

Good heed is better than great haste.

Ill weeds grow apace.

The worst friend a man can have is a flatterer.

Grip is a good dog, but Holdfast a better.

Be wise in time, it's all too late,

When Death stands knocking at the gate!

Give and Give-back make the firmest friends.

No man but finds his match at last.

He that calls out gets the dish.

Hard words break no bones.

Most folk think too much of money.

Health and wealth won't always stay,

Use them wisely while you may!

A man is a man in his own house.

Words get wings when they once slip the lips.

I never found the tongue too slow.

Forewarned is forearmed.

A soft scythe is soon blunted.

Ill-gotten is ever ill-spent.

Early to bed and early to rise,

Makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.

The day has many eyes.

The foot knows best where the shoe pinches.

What only two know is a secret, but what three know all
the world knows.

Better be silent than speak out of season.

Let sleeping dogs lie.

The fat pig's guilt is soon proved.

Unlooked-for comes at last.

A stout heart is worth more than a steel blade.

A man can only die once.

It has been said that the proverbs of a people show its thoughts and ways better than anything else. So you must try and make out

what you can about our forefathers from those given here. At all events, they are shrewd and full of good sense, and there are many folks in our day who might do much better if they kept them in mind and acted upon them.

When you come to read bigger books than this, Histories of England and Ireland and Scotland, and the Lives of Famous Men and Women that have lived in these islands, you will find much that is worth knowing and bearing in mind. For this little book can only give a very small part of what is written about the deeds and beliefs of our forefathers. And I think that, next to knowing and talking with good and great folk, which we are not always able to do, there is nothing more delightful than hearing and reading about them. But it is always to be remembered that the best and greatest men and women are not those who have the most money or are called by the highest titles or who command large armies and rule broad kingdoms, but rather, those who do all the good that is in their power to do, whether they are rich or poor, great or small. And it is not the size of a

country nor the amount of its gold and silver and other riches that makes a nation great and powerful, but the number of men and women and children in it that have kind hearts and wise heads and healthy bodies.

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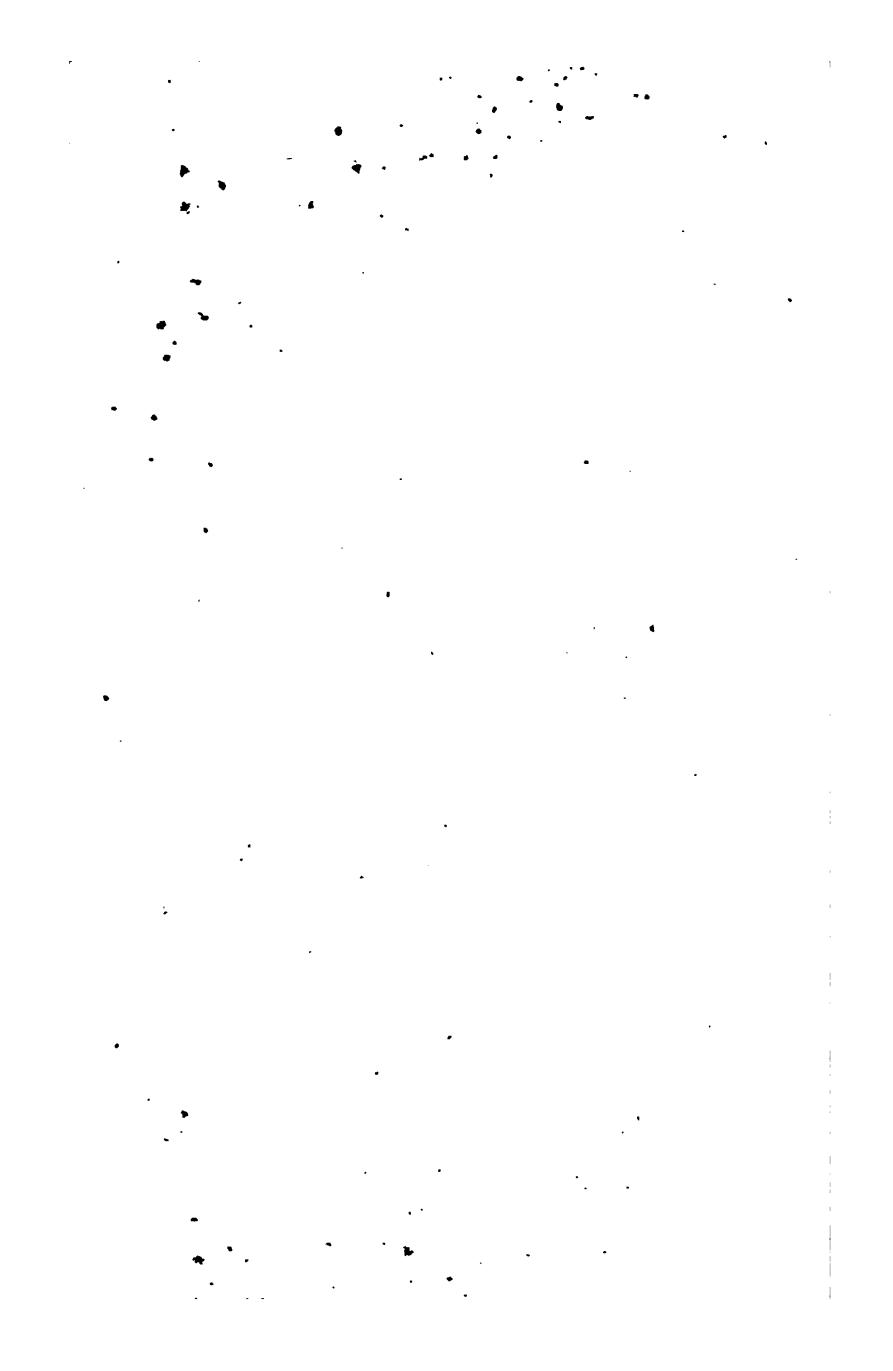
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